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House of Representatives

The House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. LALOTA).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
February 27, 2023.

I hereby appoint the Honorable NICK LALOTA to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

KEVIN MCCARTHY,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 9, 2023, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with time equally allocated between the parties and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 1:50 p.m.

HORRIFIC CONDITIONS OF MIGRANT CHILD LABOR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. SCHOLTEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the House floor to bring attention to the horrific conditions of migrant child labor happening right here in the United States of America and to urge my colleagues to stand with me and bring solutions to this appalling state of affairs. I represent west Michigan where many of these migrant children reside.

As an attorney who has spent my entire career fighting to make our immigration laws more just, more fair, more humane, and as a mother, I will not stand by as this tragedy continues. These are my constituents, these are my kids, and I will protect them with everything I have.

This weekend, The New York Times published a stunning expose shining a light on the scores of migrant children currently working on our farms, our factories, and at some of the most dangerous sites in our country. These children, some as young as 12, are working marathon shifts, often with dangerous machinery to package our foods, sew our clothes, and build our homes. The industries that employ them turn a blind eye to these children's suffering, and often seek out and willingly participate in this despicable practice.

In case I did not make myself clear, Mr. Speaker, these are children.

Stories of kids dropping out of school, collapsing from exhaustion, and even losing limbs to machinery are the things that one might expect to find in a Charles Dickens or Upton Sinclair novel, but not an account of everyday life in America in 2023; surely not here, in the land of the free, where child labor protections have been on the books for nearly a century; not in the country that holds itself up as the paragon of democracy, guaranteeing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.

And yet right here, Mr. Speaker, we are exploiting minors from other countries, children in an already vulnerable situation, to do dangerous work for low pay that often results in life-changing injuries. Those allowing these practices to continue should be ashamed of themselves.

The company at the center of this article, Heartside Foods, which packages the breakfast cereals and snacks many of us have in our cupboards right now, proudly proclaims that 25 percent

of their employees have been with the company for over a decade. I wonder if they have similar statistics they could share with us about how many of their employees were even alive a decade ago.

Many of us in this room are parents. I have two young children of my own, the same age as some of these kids in these stories. My heart aches for these children. As a mother myself, rest assured, I am approaching this problem with the urgency and ferocity that it deserves. I wouldn't walk away from my own children in these factories, and I sure as hell am not going to walk away from someone else's children.

As soon as I read this story, I immediately picked up the phone and started demanding answers and action. I called the White House, HHS, and DOL. This is a multilevel, multisystem failure that created the shadows where these children can be exploited, and we need a multilevel, multisystem approach to fix it.

I have called on the administration to create an interagency task force to ensure—ensure that this kind of child exploitation cannot happen in the United States. We, as a Congress, must also act. That means, first and foremost, holding the companies accountable with every tool at our disposal. It also means conducting oversight of the agencies responsible for enforcing these laws and ensuring they have the resources to protect the kids. What could possibly be a higher priority?

At the heart of this matter, though, is that we need long-term solutions. We need comprehensive immigration reform that addresses the root cause of this problem. I know most of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle would agree that reform is long overdue.

We need reform that addresses the border security, provides sufficient pathways for individuals to come to the United States of America, and addresses the root cause of migration.

☐ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., ☐ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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A safe and effective immigration system is essential for the United States to lead in a 21st century economy. It is a critical national security component, essential for protecting human rights, and fundamental to our identity as a land of prosperity and opportunity.

I have worked on all aspects of immigration from enforcement to advocacy and across party lines. I believe we can have an immigration system that keeps our country safe and honors human dignity because I have done it. I have worked on it, and I know I have colleagues in both parties who agree with me. I have already spoken with many of you who have expressed the same ideas.

I know that my colleagues across the aisle care as deeply about children as I do. I know that as they have stood with righteous indignation to fight for the sanctity of life, I believe now they also have the courage and moral fortitude to stand and protect children from life-threatening harm and exploitive work.

Let's come together and get this done.

EAST PALESTINE TRAIN DERAILMENT DISASTER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. JOYCE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOYCE of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address a crisis that President Biden refuses to acknowledge: the derailment of a train in East Palestine, Ohio, that has left a community traumatized and families afraid to drink the water that comes through their faucets.

Instead of compassion, these families received nothing but a cold shoulder from President Biden. Instead of certainty, these families received a rushed process to test the water that they drink and the air that they breathe.

What we need is a full accounting of events.

As a doctor, I urge the EPA to continue to repeat their tests and to provide an accurate assessment of the risks posed to our communities' air and drinking water.

An administration that fails to provide for the safety of its people is a failed administration. I stand here to urge President Biden to visit East Palestine and finally support those Americans who are hurting.

We need transparency, we need accountability, and we need to address this head-on; not with shrugs and handwringing, that is what we have seen so far from President Biden.

We need to see compassion, we need to see thoroughness, and we need to see diligence in addressing this problem.

ORIGIN OF COVID 19

Mr. JOYCE of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, 3 years ago, as a new and dangerous virus caused by the Chinese Communist Party began to spread, they shut down internal travel but allowed international flights to continue.

The Chinese Communist Party was attempting to stop COVID-19 from spreading within its own borders while allowing it to come to the shores of America.

This weekend, the Department of Energy finally confirmed what we have all along suspected: that this leak did not come from a wet market and that it escaped from a lab in central China.

This virus and the related government policies led to vaccine mandates, lost jobs, supply chain problems, and the isolation of our Nation's young people.

It is time today to hold the Chinese Communist Party accountable. What we need now is to predict, prepare, and prevent another such disaster from occurring.

The American people want and deserve answers, and they deserve accountability for the hardships that this virus, unleashed by the Chinese Communist Party, has caused. Now we need to ensure that a crisis like this can never occur again.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) for 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the role of the National Park Service in the Virgin Islands of the United States. While the National Park Service plays a vital role in preserving the natural and cultural resources and facilitating outdoor recreation throughout the Nation, I must acknowledge that the relationship between the people of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service has not always been and is not the best.

On St. Croix, the park sits on some of our most sacred ground, and it is incumbent on them to appreciate and preserve that, of course, which is important, but also to make it accessible to those of us who are living there. On St. John especially, St. Johnians are concerned and have a history in which Laurance Rockefeller was able to take so much land. There are questions even today about who owned what land, how was it taken, and how did it become part of the National Park Service.

I have continually expressed concern about the National Park Service's hiring and staffing practices in the Virgin Islands. I have encouraged the recruitment of native Virgin Islanders who understand the historical context of park spaces and possess a greater degree of cultural awareness. While there have been some hires, I have yet to see meaningful progress, and extended vacancies of National Park Service positions are a concern.

Additionally, for the past 3 years, I have suggested the formation of just a community garden within the Virgin Islands National Park Service boundaries. Such action is authorized by the

National Park Service management plan of 2006.

In fact, the Virgin Islands National Park Service general management plan of 1983 included the development of an approximately 2-acre garden plot.

The park comprises 7,259 acres, and to not have a plot for the people who live on that island to be able to garden, people who are locked around water, who have an inability to be able to get fresh fruit and vegetables to their families, it would also foster a better relationship between the community and the national park.

Last week, my office hosted a meeting to ensure that Virgin Islanders' voices—not just written comments—were received by the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service, and the Government of the Virgin Islands about the proposed Government of the Virgin Islands National Park Service St. John land exchange for the construction of a K-12 school on St. John. During this meeting, my office learned of the barriers and difficulties to submit a written statement during the final comment period.

Thankfully, the park allowed us to extend this until March 15.

While my office can advocate for the people of the Virgin Islands—presently my office and Congress is not a party to the agreement—the land exchange between the Governor of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service seems to be going through.

While I may not always agree with our Governor, in this instance I recognize that he is between a rock and a hard place presently as Virgin Islanders are quickly approaching their deadline for using Federal funding to rebuild the school. As we all know, the National Park Service process takes time.

Indeed, Senator ANGUS KING, who last Congress headed up the Natural Resources Committee in the Senate, was only able to get the National Park Service to donate land in Maine after 30 years of advocacy.

The children of the Virgin Islands do not have that time.

□ 1215

Additionally, we are approaching the end of the Caneel Bay Redevelopment and Management Environmental Assessment public comment period. The National Park Service owns 70 percent of the island of St. John, making it one of the most pristine islands not only in the Virgin Islands but in the Caribbean.

The path forward for a resort at Caneel Bay must consider the socioeconomic and environmental impact on the Virgin Islands. Caneel Bay contains some of the best beaches in the world, and to not utilize the property as a world-class, five-star resort would put the Virgin Islands at a disadvantage for tourism dollars.

The path forward for Caneel Bay impacts not just St. John but the entire territory. If Caneel Bay is relegated to